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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000401

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SUBJECT: LESOTHO: GOL APPEALS FOR HELP IN DEALING WITH OPPOSITION

REF: A) MASERU 389 AND PREVIOUS; B) MASERU 367

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a.i., EXEC, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[¶1.](#) (C) SUMMARY: At a briefing for resident chiefs of mission on July 6, Foreign Minister Tsekoa reiterated his desire that the international community support the "government of the day" and desist from taking a neutral stance toward the political impasse between the GOL and the political opposition. Tsekoa called on diplomats to "whisper into the ears" of "those (in the opposition) who would disrupt Lesotho's democracy." Minister of Communications Metsing belittled Lesotho's opposition in response to a suggestion the GOL should not dismiss public complaints of human rights abuses. The desire of senior technocrats to move beyond the impasse and return to the pressing business of governance and development evokes sympathy, but hardliners within the cabinet who seem accepting of confrontation at the expense of dialogue suggest that Lesotho's unease will persist for the foreseeable future. END SUMMARY.

Foreign Minister's Briefing

[¶2.](#) (SBU) During a July 6 briefing by Foreign Minister Tsekoa for Maseru's resident diplomatic corps, also attended by Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Phooko and Minister of Communications, Science, and Technology Metsing, Tsekoa touched on three topics: 1) the recent AU Summit; 2) the GOL's relationship with the diplomatic corps, and 3) the current security situation in Lesotho. Chiefs of Mission from the Irish, EC, South African, U.S. (Charge plus poloff note taker), Chinese, Libyan, and UN missions attended.

[¶3.](#) (C) In regard to the AU Summit in Ghana, at which Tsekoa joined PM Mosisili in attending, the Foreign Minister noted the divide between nations pushing for immediate political integration and those, like Lesotho, who foresee a United States of Africa "maybe in our grandchildren's time." He noted that the AU supports the strengthening of regional unions such as SADC, and that a ministerial executive council will present its finding on possible benchmarks for further integration at the next Summit in January 2008.

You Are Not Neutral, And Should Whisper

[¶4.](#) (C) Minister Tsekoa, noting that the resident diplomatic missions are "physical representatives of international cooperation" with Lesotho, once again stated his dismay that

foreign diplomats in Lesotho could consider themselves neutral (ref B) in the face of an opposition which "attempted to remove this government by coup." He observed disapprovingly the dialogue which several foreign missions maintained with the political opposition, stating that such contact should be instead aimed at the "government that was elected freely and fairly." He asked, however, that the assembled heads of mission "whisper in the ears of those (the opposition) who would disrupt stability." Tsekoa added that it is the duty of diplomatic representatives to dissuade those who want "to go down the path of destruction."

15. (C) Irish Ambassador Fay, acting dean of the diplomatic corps, responded that resident diplomats were committed to working with the GOL and to achieving peace in Lesotho. He reiterated previous views (ref B), however, that the international community would remain neutral vis-a-vis the impasse between the governing LCD and other political parties as well as on other partisan issues. Resident UN Representative Haji-Mohammed added that no path exists for the international community's development work in Lesotho that did not involve the GOL.

16. (C) Commenting on the current security situation, Minister Phooko noted that a July 5 opposition march, which the GOL had initially signaled to diplomats its intent to prevent, was "well controlled by both sides" (police and opposition). Charge opined that the fact the march and protest took place, and peacefully, helped to strengthen Lesotho's democracy and was at least a partial result of the diplomatic community's dialogue with the GOL and with the opposition to head off a confrontation. Phooko and Tsekoa concurred.

The Hard Line Minister

17. (C) In contrast to Minister Tsekoa's measured and conciliatory tone, Minister Metsing maintained a hard line, painting Lesotho's opposition as implacable, deceptive, and violent. Charge noted that, while the diplomatic community would continue to "whisper suggestions" for peaceful dialogue

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into opposition ears, the GOL should also listen and ensure that public complaints of human rights abuses are not dismissed, but rather taken seriously and addressed. Minister Metsing responded by insisting that Lesotho's opposition was consciously spreading disinformation about the GOL and was aiding and abetting coup plotters. After citing the behavior of opposition groups, he categorically dismissed opposition grievances, asking the rhetorical question, "What kind of opposition do we have in this country?"

"They'll Lose Me"

18. (C/NF) At the Embassy's Independence Day reception on July 4, Minister of Finance and Development Planning Timothy Thahane, one of the GOL's most respected figures, expressed appreciation to Charge for remarks that called for dialogue and adherence to the rule of law by all elected representatives, regardless of ideology or party affiliation. Thahane said that unless the GOL, and especially hardliners such as Minister of Local Government Sekoane, deals with human rights issues, "They'll lose me and others like me." On July 7, All Basotho Convention (ABC) party leader Thomas Thabane called Charge to express concerns over the military's efforts to surround a police station and seize five men implicated in coup plotting and ordered released by Lesotho's High Court (septel). Charge advised Thabane, who said he had not spoken with security officials, to dialogue directly with the GOL in order to express his concerns and ensure that the security situation does not deteriorate.

Divides

19. (C) COMMENT: The GOL would clearly like to see the political opposition go quietly, and quickly, into the night. Frustrated by recent attacks and alleged plots against the government, the GOL is equally flummoxed by ABC Tom Thabane and his ability to mobilize broad urban support for mass action and protests. The desire of senior technocrats, like FM Tsekoa, to move beyond the impasse and return to the pressing business of governance and development evokes sympathy, but hardliners within the cabinet who seem accepting of confrontation at the expense of dialogue and compromise suggest that Lesotho's unease will persist for the foreseeable future. END COMMENT.
MURPHY